

Assisting children with depression

Suggestions for parents and carers

Children with depression see the world as hopeless and themselves as helpless.

Their mistaken beliefs suggest that nothing can help, that everything is ruined, or that they are to blame. Their thinking and feelings get caught in a negative spiral. Ordinary things often seem too hard. They feel bad and don't know how to feel better.

How you can help

Parents and other adults can help children with depression by being understanding and supportive. They can show they care by listening and by helping them to sort out problems. They can spend time together with children and let them know they are confident that things will get better.

Provide time and space to talk

Make time and space for your child to talk to you. It works best when you can be unhurried and uninterrupted. Often children find it easier to talk when doing something with you. Doing ordinary things like playing with you at home, going on a shopping trip, or going for a long drive might provide opportunities for them to open up.

Listen fully

If you want your child to talk, don't judge what they say or offer advice that wasn't asked for. Allow crying, swearing, or whatever else helps get out whatever is on your child's mind before you start responding to it.

Help them think again

Ask for other explanations for whatever has happened. Gently ask whether there might be another explanation for things happening the way they did and try to help the child see that it's not as awful as he/she thinks. Help them find better ways to solve the problem.

Encourage contact with others

Social contact can help to reduce unhappy feelings—it helps to know you're liked, loved and appreciated. It can help to think about others and not just yourself. Friends can also suggest better ways of thinking about situations.

Do fun things

Having fun has a therapeutic effect. Although children who are depressed may be reluctant to participate at first, fun activities can be extremely helpful for lifting their mood.

Encourage relaxation

Having quiet, unpressured time is important. It lessens nervous tension, and negative thinking.

Don't wait to seek help

Depression in children is a serious problem and usually does not get better by itself. If you are concerned about a child don't wait for things to change. Talk with school staff about how your child is going at school. Speak with the school psychologist or your family doctor and if necessary get a referral for treatment.

This resource is part of the KidsMatter trial. The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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